



Massachusetts Department of  
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY  
EDUCATION

## Adult Basic Education Strategic Plan Task Force Report

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Summer, 2009

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## **SECTION 1: Message from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

## **SECTION 2: Executive Summary**

## **SECTION 3: Adult Basic Education Background**

- ABE Services – The Cornerstone of Public Policy Priorities
- An Integral Component of the Workforce Development System
- One of the Nation’s Most Diverse Provider Networks
- Components of the ABE System Infrastructure
  - Teaching and Learning
    - Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks
    - Standardized Assessments
    - Teacher Licensure
    - System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES)
  - Alternative Delivery Models and Settings
    - Distance Learning
    - ABE for Incarcerated Adults
  - Inter-agency Partnerships
    - Workplace Education Program
    - Family Literacy
    - Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium
    - Pathways to Family Success
    - ABE Community Planning
  - Accountability
    - SMARTT Data Management System
- Performance Standards

## **SECTION 4: Challenges to the Adult Basic Education System As We Face the Future Together**

- Economic Challenges
- National Challenges
- Massachusetts Challenges
- Adult and Community Learning Services Challenges

## **SECTION 5: Task Force Charge and Process for Deliberations**

## **SECTION 6: Task Force Recommendations**

## **SECTION 7: Next Steps**

## **APPENDICES**

- A. Reference Documents Provided to the Task Force
- B. Acknowledgements: List of Task Force members and ACLS Task Force staff
- C. Criteria for Evaluation of Recommendations
- D. Service Plan Model Presentation (Power Point)

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## SECTION 1: MESSAGE FROM MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

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The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education supports over twenty-two thousand underemployed and unemployed adult students in improving their basic skills and/or English language skills through academic skill-building and supportive services in over two hundred Adult Basic Education programs across the Commonwealth. In a recently released report entitled, *Facing the Future: The Massachusetts Strategic Framework for Adult Basic Education*, the Department's Adult and Community Learning Services unit (ACLS) frames this work in the context of three major public policy goals – the Commonwealth's *education* goals, its *economic and workforce development* goals, and its *civic engagement and community strength* goals. The *Framework* identifies the priorities that will guide the Department and inform its partners as policy and resource decisions are made in order to ensure that all of the Commonwealth's residents have access to public education as a route to college, family-sustaining jobs and an active civic life. The *Framework*, developed with input from over 5,000 stakeholders in a range of venues to provide maximum opportunities for input, identifies three strategic goals that will ensure a strong, effective, and accessible adult basic education system in the years to come.

The three goals identified in *Facing the Future* are meant to enhance and expand the good work that ABE programs are doing now, and position them to be able to take advantage of promising new opportunities. The first goal, *ensure that adults needing basic education have access to services*, attests to the ABE system's commitment to keep the door of opportunity open to all adult learners in need of literacy and language skills. The second goal, *increase system effectiveness and quality*, incorporates both a commitment to support critical program elements such as counseling and a well-qualified workforce, and recognition of the need to hold programs accountable for continuously improving services that result in increased student outcomes. The third goal, *prepare students for success in their next steps: in college and further training, at work, and in the community*, acknowledges the ABE system's responsibility to support adult learners beyond just preparing them to earn a high school equivalency, to preparing them to qualify to earn a family-sustaining wage. The *Framework* asserts, "Common sense and current research tell us that in order to improve the quality of the lives of adult learners and their families, it is necessary to support them in the successful transition to next steps including college, further training, advancement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace and civic engagement." It is clear that the ABE system must ensure that adult learners can acquire the skills they need for success.

From December 2008 through May 2009, ACLS convened a task force to make recommendations regarding how the ABE system can best accomplish the goals outlined in the *Framework*. This report captures the recommendations from that task force, as well as a context and rationale for each recommendation, and summaries of majority and minority positions on issues. During the last quarter of 2009, ACLS will be seeking comment on these recommendations from the ABE community and other stakeholders. Following that period of public comment, ACLS will issue a written response to the report that will include its decisions on each recommendation and implementation plans.

Adult and Community Learning Services expresses its sincere appreciation to the thirty professionals, listed in the appendix, who contributed their time and ideas to the task force, and to this report. Their work has already set in motion a series of practical action steps aimed at expanding and improving the state's ABE system so that many more adults can enrich and improve their lives, the lives of their children and families, and the hundreds of communities in the Commonwealth for years to come.

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## SECTION 2: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### INTRODUCTION:

The Adult Basic Education Strategic Framework Task Force was convened over the winter and spring of 2008-2009 by the Adult and Community Learning Services unit of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.<sup>1</sup>

The ambitious work of the ABE Strategic Framework Task Force was vital to ensuring that the adult basic education system could achieve the goals of *Facing the Future: The Massachusetts Strategic Framework for Adult Basic Education*, and that those goals would be achieved in a way that promotes effectiveness, accountability, creativity, flexibility and efficiency.

The goals of the *Massachusetts Strategic Framework for Adult Basic Education* are as follows:<sup>2</sup>

- 1) Ensure that adults needing basic education have access to services.
- 2) Increase system effectiveness and quality.
- 3) Prepare students for success in their next steps: in college and further training, at work, and in the community.

The recommendations in this report are intended to guide adult basic education policy for more than the next Workforce Investment Act re-authorization period or the next multi-year funding period. The true test of both the Strategic Framework and these recommendations will be if they ultimately help improve the quality of services provided to students, become a touchstone for adult basic education, and continue to inspire adult basic education services and policy well into the future.

### CHARGE OF THE TASK FORCE:

The charge of the Task Force was to provide recommendations for achieving these goals, specifically regarding how best to:

- 1) **Increase access to intensity of services for those who need them** (*addressing ABE Strategic Goal 1*);
- 2) **Increase regulatory flexibility and opportunities to support program innovation** (*addressing ABE Strategic Goal 2*);
- 3) **Strengthen instruction and build teacher capacity** (*addressing ABE Strategic Goals 2 and 3*);
- 4) **Expand access to counseling, to better meet the needs of ABE students** (*addressing ABE Strategic Goal 3*).

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<sup>1</sup> The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is referred to as ESE. Adult and Community Learning Services is referred to as ACLS.

<sup>2</sup> *Facing the Future: the Massachusetts Strategic Framework for Adult Basic Education*, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009.

## TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS:

TASK FORCE AREA OF FOCUS	STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK GOAL	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p style="text-align: center;">INCREASE ACCESS TO INTENSIVE SERVICES FOR THOSE WHO NEED THEM</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>STRATEGIC GOAL 1:</u> <i>Ensure that adults needing basic education have access to services.</i></p>	<p>The task force recommends . . .</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. . . . that the provision of intensive instructional services be linked to demonstrated need in the community.</li> <li>2. . . . exploring a policy for providing services to address the needs of high level ESOL students with a Student Performance Level (SPL) 7 and above.</li> </ol>
<p style="text-align: center;">INCREASE REGULATORY FLEXIBILITY AND OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT PROGRAM INNOVATION</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>STRATEGIC GOAL 2:</u> <i>Increase system effectiveness and quality.</i></p>	<p>The task force recommends . . .</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. . . . a greater focus on outcomes that demonstrate quality than on processes intended to promote quality.</li> <li>4. . . . adoption of the Service Plan Model*.</li> </ol> <p>(*see Appendix for description of Service Plan Model presented to the Task Force on February 6, 2009.)</p>

TASK FORCE AREA OF FOCUS	STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK GOAL	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>STRENGTHEN INSTRUCTION AND BUILD TEACHER CAPACITY</p>	<p><u>STRATEGIC GOAL 2:</u> <i>Increase system effectiveness and quality,</i></p> <p><i>AND,</i></p> <p><u>STRATEGIC GOAL 3:</u> <i>Prepare students for success in their next steps, in college and further training, at work and in the community.</i></p>	<p>The task force recommends . . .</p> <p>5. . . . that every classroom teacher be required to have a four-year degree and that a waiver be allowed.</p> <p>6. . . . that ABE Teacher Licensure remain voluntary.</p> <p>7. . . . the use of content specialists to strengthen instruction and build teacher capacity.</p> <p>8. . . . establishing minimum qualifications for content specialists who provide staff development expertise and support to teaching staff.</p> <p>9. . . . adequate funding and increased flexibility for SABES to respond to emerging program needs.</p> <p>10. . . . that the state funding allocation for ABE keep pace with rising personnel costs (e.g., the cost of living, educational materials, energy, health insurance, rent and utilities, student transportation and travel).</p> <p>11. . . . that the ESE salary rates be increased annually by the percentage of the cost of living index.</p> <p>12. . . . that ACLS work with the Massachusetts Coalition for <u>Adult Education (MCAE), the Massachusetts Directors' Council,</u> ABE providers, and stakeholders to develop strategies to increase full-time positions.</p>
	<p>Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education – Adult and Community Learning Services <b>ABE Strategic Plan Task Force Report - Summer, 2009</b> Page 7 of 52</p>	

TASK FORCE AREA OF FOCUS	STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK GOAL	RECOMMENDATIONS
EXPAND ACCESS TO COUNSELING, TO BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF ABE STUDENTS	<p><u>STRATEGIC GOAL 3:</u></p> <p><i>Prepare students for success in their next steps: in college and further training, at work, and in the community.</i></p>	<p>The task force recommends...</p> <p>13. . . . focusing counseling on transition planning beginning with student intake and continuing throughout the student's enrollment in the program.</p>



## SECTION 3: ADULT BASIC EDUCATION BACKGROUND<sup>3</sup>

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### ABE SERVICES – THE CORNERSTONE OF PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES:

The Massachusetts Adult Basic Education (ABE) system provides instructional services to adults in Adult Secondary Education (ASE) or high school credentialing (which encompasses both GED and Adult Diploma preparation), pre-ASE, adult basic education (reading, writing and math), basic literacy, and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

In addition to the core instructional offerings noted above, programs also provide a range of educational services such as employment/career readiness, citizenship, transition to college, computer-assisted instruction, distance learning, family literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, services to the homeless, student leadership development and community participation, and workplace education.

In 1993, the Commonwealth, through the Education Reform Act, recognized ABE as an essential component of the state's public education system and charged the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with the lead responsibility for developing and managing an effective ABE service delivery system. After the inclusion of ABE in the landmark Education Reform Act, the Massachusetts Board of Education embraced universal access to adult basic education for adults in the Commonwealth by adopting the following mission<sup>4</sup>:

*To provide each and every adult with opportunities to develop literacy skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, and better employment, and to reach his/her full potential as a family member, productive worker, and citizen.*

In acknowledging its responsibility to provide opportunities for basic skills instruction to every adult who needed it, the Massachusetts Board of Education underscored the importance of adult basic education to individuals, families, the quality of life in the community, the development of an educated workforce, and the state's economic prosperity. Clearly, adult basic education is at the cornerstone of many of today's pressing public policy priorities:

- **Poverty:** Families headed by adults without a high school diploma suffer severe economic consequences.<sup>5</sup>
- **Workforce development:** Good-paying jobs for those without college degrees or advanced skills have become considerably harder to find, and more so in our state than in other parts of

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<sup>3</sup> Section 3 of this report was excerpted with permission from *A White Paper: The Importance of the Adult Basic Education System to Workforce Development*, MA Coalition for Adult Education, Public Policy Committee, 2006. Additional statistics can be found in *Facing the Future: The Massachusetts Strategic Framework for Adult Basic Education*, Massachusetts Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website: <http://doe.mass.edu/acls>.

<sup>5</sup> *The State of the American Dream in Massachusetts*, MassINC, 2002.

the nation.<sup>6</sup> More than 1.1 million (1/3) of the state's 3.2 million workers do not have the skills required to perform in the state's rapidly changing economy and need ABE services.<sup>7</sup>

- **School success for children and the success of education reform:** The best indicator of a child's future success in school is the educational level of the mother.<sup>8</sup>
- **Civic engagement:** Civic and community participation suffer when adults do not have sufficient literacy skills.<sup>9</sup>
- **Health care:** Adults suffer adverse health outcomes as a result of low literacy skills.<sup>10</sup>
- **Public Safety:** Incarceration and recidivism rates are high among adults who do not have sufficient literacy skills.<sup>11</sup>

#### **AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM:**

The ABE system is an essential and integral component of the workforce development system. ABE provides adults with the basic skills they need to enroll in job training programs, successfully complete them and take advantage of career advancement opportunities. There is no question that the proficiency gained by undereducated adults through the ABE system is a pre-requisite to their qualifying for even the most basic training, further education and better jobs.

#### **ONE OF THE NATION'S MOST DIVERSE PROVIDER NETWORKS:**

One of the great strengths of the Massachusetts ABE system is its diverse provider network. ABE services are provided by community-based organizations, local educational authorities, community colleges, higher education, correctional facilities, businesses and labor unions. This diversity provides the best possible access for adults, allowing them multiple points of entry in the community so they can enroll at a program that is geographically accessible, meets their educational needs and may already be a resource with which they are comfortable thereby encouraging enrollment and persistence.

#### **THE ABE SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE – ENABLING SYSTEM STRENGTH AND EFFECTIVENESS:**

The Massachusetts ABE system infrastructure is designed to provide the necessary foundation on which to build a strong, sustainable and responsive system that provides quality services and can

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<sup>6</sup> *Mass Economy: The Labor Supply and Our Economic Future*, MassINC, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> *New Skills for a New Economy: Adult Education's Key Role in Sustaining Economic Growth and Expanding Opportunity*, MassINC, 2000

<sup>8</sup> *Teach the Mother and Reach the Child: Literacy Across Generations*. Literacy Lessons, Sticht, T. G., & McDonald, B.A. (1990).

<sup>9</sup> The National Adult Literacy Survey, Educational Testing Service, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, *Literacy and Health Outcomes*, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> The National Adult Literacy Survey, Educational Testing Service, 1993; and The Policy Information Center of Educational Testing Service.

continuously improve. Components of the system<sup>12</sup> include elements focused on teaching and learning, alternative delivery models and settings, inter-agency partnerships, and accountability.

### Teaching and Learning:

- **Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks:** Modeled on the K-12 curriculum frameworks used to guide teachers in lesson plan development and content, there are frameworks in English Language Arts, Math and Numeracy, ESOL, history and social sciences, and health. The frameworks document the skills and content that an adult learner needs to know and be able to perform to function successfully in her/his role as a parent, family member, worker, citizen, and life-long learner. A set of Common Chapters provide an overview of the ABE Curriculum Frameworks, including a brief history of their development, a synopsis of the ABE and ESOL context for which they are intended, and an explanation of the role of the Adult and Community Learning Services unit of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/frameworks/>
- **Standardized Assessments:** All programs funded by ACLS must utilize standardized assessments approved by the U.S. Department of Education. ESOL programs in Massachusetts use the BEST Plus and REEP to assess English language conversation and writing skills respectively. ABE students are assessed utilizing the TABE and the Massachusetts Adult Proficiency Test (MAPT), an assessment developed by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The MAPT is a web-based, adaptive, computerized assessment aligned with the content of the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks.  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/assessment/>
- **Teacher Licensure:** With standards equivalent to the K-12 teacher certification, the ABE teacher license is a voluntary credential. ABE practitioners seeking a license are required to meet professional standards and pass the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL), which consist of the Communication and Literacy Skills Test and the ABE Subject Matter Test, the first of its kind in the nation.  
[http://www.doe.mass.edu/educators/e\\_license.html?section=abe](http://www.doe.mass.edu/educators/e_license.html?section=abe)
- **The System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES):** With a national reputation for excellence in program and staff development, SABES consists of five regional support centers located at community colleges and the University of Massachusetts/Boston, and a central resource center at World Education in Boston. SABES provides comprehensive training, technical assistance, and the dissemination of research and focused publications for practitioners. The purpose of SABES is to improve teaching, strengthen programs, and improve student outcomes. <http://sabes.org/>

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<sup>12</sup> More detail about the components of the infrastructure and the performance standards can be found at the ACLS website: <http://doe.mass.edu/acls>.

### Alternative Delivery Models and Settings:

- **Distance Learning:** The Distance Learning program provides access to educational services by delivering Adult Basic Education instruction through distance learning to adult learners who cannot enroll and/or participate in classroom based instruction, or who must interrupt their classroom based instruction because of barriers such as transportation, childcare, or work and family schedules. Following intake, orientation, and assessment in a face-to-face setting, usually in a local community adult learning center (CALC), primary instruction takes place at a distance. During the course of instruction, limited face-to-face contact may take place in a variety of settings, such as a drop-in center, adult learning center or library, to provide additional support services, including educational counseling.  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/dl/>
- **ABE for Incarcerated Adults:** For inmates earning a GED prior to release, recidivism among inmates in Massachusetts' medium security facilities is reduced by 23%. At an annual cost of \$43,000 per inmate, the Commonwealth saves over one million dollars per year for every 25 people who do not return to the corrections system. The ABE for Incarcerated Adults program provides access to Adult Basic Education services for offenders, age 16 or older, who are in correctional institutions across the Commonwealth. Services enhance the ability of institutionalized offenders to read, write, and speak English and to compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function in society upon release from the correctional facility.

### Inter-agency Partnerships:

- **Workplace Education Program:** The workplace education program provides basic skills instruction at the workplace and union halls, where access is especially important for low-skilled workers unable to access community adult learning centers. These partnerships serve the needs of the employers, unions and employees, and represent a private sector investment where some programs continue to operate after the end of the grant period. The Workplace Education program is a collaboration with the Executive Office of Workforce Development and Commonwealth Corporation.
- **Family Literacy:** Family literacy coordinates learning among different generations in the same family which helps both adults and children reach their full personal, social, and economic potential. Many family literacy models exist, ranging from simple intergenerational activities such as parents and children reading together to comprehensive family literacy programs. A comprehensive family literacy program often includes components such as: adult education; age appropriate education for children; parents and children learning together (PACT); parenting skills; and, home visits to reinforce learning. ACLS supports comprehensive family literacy programming through federal Even Start grants; with supplementary funding, ACLS also supports less intensive family literacy activities in some community adult learning centers. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/familylit/>
- **The Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium (MFLC)** is a statewide initiative with the mission of forging effective partnerships among state agencies, community organizations, and other interested parties to expand and strengthen family literacy and support. MFLC

members believe that the comprehensive integration of their respective services can add up to so much more than the sum of their separate parts – and that family literacy is a catalyst for collaboration and integration. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/familylit/mflc.html>

- A joint project among MFLC member agencies and the Verizon Foundation, the **Pathways to Family Success** (PFS) project supports broad-based community partnerships to bridge the gaps between education, employment, health, and human services. Service providers identify ways to more fully serve the most vulnerable families; service recipients receive the range of services that helps them move along a pathway to family success.
- **ABE Community Planning:** A statewide initiative involving all ACLS-funded programs, ABE community planning was first intended to coordinate services among ABE service providers and has since evolved into community-wide initiatives involving public and private stakeholders with a common goal of coordinating and integrating ABE services with other services utilized by students in the community (e.g., employment and training, health and human services). The ABE community planning initiative supports ESE-funded adult education programs in developing and sustaining local partnerships involving every organization in the community with an interest in providing educational and support services to undereducated and/or limited English proficient adults and their families. ABE community planning is intended to foster collaboration, investment, and responsive innovation across the system by supporting ABE providers and other entities who serve the same population to work together. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/cp/>
- **ABE Transition to Community College Program:** The purpose of the Adult Basic Education Transition to Community College program is to enable Massachusetts community colleges, in coordination with designated Community Adult Learning Centers in their catchment areas, to provide programs that successfully transition adult learners into post-secondary education. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/cc/>

Accountability:

- **The System for Managing Accountability and Results Through Technology for Adult Basic Education (SMARTT-ABE)** data management system: A proprietary, state-of-the-art, highly secure, online application and database, SMARTT is the most comprehensive ABE data management system in the country. Used by every program to enter student and other program level data on a live basis throughout the year, SMARTT includes all demographics, assessment, attendance and goal attainment information required by the National Reporting System under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), in addition to supplemental information required by ACLS. To allow practitioners to utilize data to continuously improve their programs, ACLS has incorporated an industry leading commercial software reporting application in which numerous highly customized reports have been implemented.

## **PERFORMANCE STANDARDS – A DRIVE TOWARD EXCELLENCE:**

The ABE system stands out in the Commonwealth as a system with a commitment to rigorous program performance standards driven by an equally strong commitment to providing the high quality services that ABE students deserve. The performance standards, as one part of a larger system of accountability, encourage continuous improvement, effective program administration, and positive student outcomes.

ACLS monitors program data monthly on six areas: attendance, average attended hours, pre- and post-test percentage (a measure of retention), learner gains, student goals set and met, and completion of a National Reporting System (NRS) functional level. This data is compared with the state performance standard for each area. The standards and program performance data are also available to the programs, and training in accessing, understanding, and using the data is provided throughout the year. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/pawg/>

In FY 2009, 80% of ESE-funded core ABE/ESOL programs met or exceeded the state performance standard for student learning gains. Students identify a range of goals for participating in ABE, and they met an average of 2 such goals each in FY 2009. Adults in ESE-funded programs attended, on average, 141 hours in FY 2009, above the national average of approximately 100 hours per student, and an increase over the FY 2008 average.

Annually, ACLS selects a subset of programs for a more thorough on-site, monitoring team visit. Programs selected for on-site monitoring team visits both programs that may be in need of assistance and programs that may have promising practices to share. Programs are identified as in need of assistance or having the potential for promising practices based on their performance on the performance standards referenced above, on various reports they submit, and on information gathered by ACLS staff in site visits and ongoing communication with their assigned programs. Massachusetts' *Indicators of ABE Program Quality* provide the overall framework for the monitoring team visit, with additional criteria provided by Massachusetts' *Guidelines for Effective Adult Basic Education Programs* and the *Performance Standards for ABE Programs*. Following the on-site monitoring team visit, a report is prepared and sent to the program identifying promising practices, areas of non-compliance, and recommendations for possible improvement.

All ESE-funded ABE/ESOL programs are required to engage in a structured approach to planning for continuous improvement, and submit a plan annually to ACLS. The goal of program planning is to ensure the program is offering high quality services to students to assist them in meeting their goals. A program that has not met one or more of the performance standards must address how they plan to improve their performance relative to those standards in the Continuous Improvement Plan. If a program has met all the standards, the required plan is not restricted to addressing the performance standards, but may address areas of improvement identified through its planning and evaluation process.

All of these approaches to continuous improvement – the desk audits, the on-site monitoring team visits, and the continuous improvement plans, are used to inform professional development and technical assistance priorities for ACLS and SABES.



## SECTION 4: CHALLENGES TO THE ADULT BASIC EDUCATION SYSTEM AS WE FACE THE FUTURE TOGETHER

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Furthering the goals of the *Massachusetts Strategic Framework for Adult Basic Education* and implementing the recommendations of the Strategic Plan Task Force will require us to forge ahead against the backdrop of significant and complicated challenges – globally, nationally, within the Commonwealth, and within ACLS. These challenges will test all of our organizational systems and structures – education overall, ABE, labor and workforce development, the economy, all levels of government, and the public and private sector. Our success depends on our ability to understand the challenges that face us, to work together undaunted through these difficult times, to have the courage to “let go of one vine” before we’ve grasped the next one and, most importantly, to stay true to the task at hand – providing the best possible ABE services to those who depend on those services to sustain themselves and their families, live the kind of life they want to live, and fulfill their dreams.

The outline of challenges in this section is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to highlight those issues that are most pressing and relevant to the need for and provision of ABE services, and to the recommendations contained later in this report.

### ECONOMIC CHALLENGES:

Not surprisingly, the state of the global, national and state economies is one of the most profound challenges for ABE. The severe recession that has gripped the economy since December 2007 has cost millions of jobs, increased competition for existing jobs, and limited the public and private funding that can be invested in ABE services and other public assistance services utilized by ABE students. The current recession has been characterized by Andrew Sum and his colleagues at Northeastern University’s Center for Labor Market Studies as potentially the longest in post-World War II history and the most costly in terms of payroll jobs lost and unemployment rate increases<sup>13</sup>. Even before the recession deepened, competition for jobs had intensified due to the outsourcing of jobs to workers in other countries, and the increase in qualified individuals from other countries entering the United States to work.

The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) passed in February 2009 by Congress and signed by President Obama, is intended to “jumpstart” the nation’s economy by immediately creating and saving jobs through “shovel ready” projects and by making strategic, long-term investments to encourage sustainable economic growth. Priority areas include: job creation,

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<sup>13</sup> *The Economic Recession of 2007-2009: A Comparative perspective on Its Duration and the Severity of Its Labor Market Impacts*, Andrew Sum, Ishwar Khatiwada, Joseph McLaughlin and Sheila Palma, Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, April 2009 ([http://www.clms.neu.edu/publication/documents/Economic\\_Recession\\_of\\_20072009.pdf](http://www.clms.neu.edu/publication/documents/Economic_Recession_of_20072009.pdf))

education and training, state and local relief, tax relief, health care, energy, infrastructure and science, and services to vulnerable populations.<sup>14</sup>

Under the Recovery Act, Massachusetts has, to date, received a commitment for \$8.7 billion over the next two years, including \$1.9 billion for education and \$90.1 million for labor and workforce development. According to Secretary of Education Paul Reville, the education funding will help:

*“... restore fiscal shortfalls that have come about due to the nation’s economic crisis. While stimulus funds will not solve all of our problems, they will allow us both to restore support for early education, K-12, and higher education and to pursue innovative approaches to improving our public schools and institutions of higher education. Through a combination of formula-based funds, funds to support construction and modernization of facilities, funding for research, and multiple competitive grants for which Massachusetts is well-equipped to pursue, we will continue to make progress on Governor Patrick’s robust education agenda that is aimed at ensuring that all students will be prepared to reach their full potential.”<sup>15</sup>*

Although the Recovery Act unfortunately did not allocate funds specifically to the existing ABE system supported by Title II of the federal Workforce Investment Act, ABE is an allowable activity under the Act. At a time when the need for ABE services is increasing, there are opportunities for the ABE system to increase services through sub-contracting with the state’s Workforce Investment Boards and One-Stop Career Centers. The Workforce Investment Boards received ARRA funding through the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development for job training and support services, including helping dislocated workers receive assistance with literacy training, GED completion, and improving their English proficiency.

Global competition in the workforce and the economic downturn demand that the ABE system be a key participant in economic recovery efforts, especially those that involve other components of the public education infrastructure. The ABE system provides adults with the basic skills they need to enroll in job training programs, successfully complete them and take advantage of career advancement opportunities. There is no question that the proficiency gained by undereducated adults through the ABE system is a pre-requisite to their qualifying for even the most basic training, further education and better jobs. There is also no question that adult basic education is crucial to the quality of life in every community, the development of an educated workforce and the state’s economic prosperity.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For more information about the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funding and projects, refer to the federal website [www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov) and the state’s web site [www.mass.gov/recovery](http://www.mass.gov/recovery).

<sup>15</sup> For the full text of Secretary Reville’s statement, refer to <http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eoeterminal&L=3&L0=Home&L1=Federal+Stimulus+Funds&L2=Recovery+and+Reinvestment+-+Education&sid=Eeoe&b=terminalcontent&f=arramessagefrompaul&csid=Eeoe>.

<sup>16</sup> Adapted with permission from *A White Paper: The Importance of the Adult Basic Education System to Workforce Development*, MA Coalition for Adult Education, Public Policy Committee, 2006, p. 2.



As a key participant in economic recovery, the ABE system must be nimble enough to respond quickly to changing economic demographics and industry needs, and be able to provide the instruction that will help ABE students secure jobs or better jobs, and enroll in higher education or job training programs.

*"What a scandalous thing it will be when you look back one hundred years from now and realize that the only characters who were regarded as good enough to teach were the ones between the ages of 3 and 15. And after that, they were thrown out into a chaotic world and were never supposed to be taught again."*

*Dr. Edwin Land  
Founder of Polaroid Corporation*

## **NATIONAL CHALLENGES:**

Challenges at the national level congregate around non-economic stimulus legislation, funding, public awareness of ABE, and recognition of the importance of ABE to everyone's prosperity.

Federal ABE funding is provided under Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, which is still awaiting re-authorization by Congress. As the successor to the Adult Education Act as amended by the National Literacy Act of 1991, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) reformed federal employment, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation programs to create an integrated, "one-stop" system of workforce investment and education activities for adults and youth.<sup>17</sup>

WIA currently mandates that the state provides a non-federal contribution (i.e., matching funds, or "the match") and that the match must maintain a required level of investment from year to year (i.e., "the maintenance of effort"). States that do not comply with either or both of these provisions risk a disproportionate loss of federal ABE funding. Likewise, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education requires ABE grantees to provide a matching contribution of local and/or private funds. While states can apply for and receive a one-time waiver under exceptional or uncontrollable circumstances and local programs can also apply for waiver relief, the requirement helps to prevent some precipitous reductions in ABE funding at the state and local levels.

Future regulations under a re-authorized Workforce Investment Act will have an impact on state initiatives and activities, including the required submission of the Massachusetts state plan to the U.S. Department of Education, as well as any newly promulgated provisions regarding collaborations with the workforce development system, community colleges, business or labor, and the maintenance of effort.

Funding and public awareness are intertwined. While legislative bodies can continue to support ABE funding because they recognize the return on investment to communities and believe it is the right thing to do, an upsurge in expressed support from their constituents would inevitably have a positive impact on the level of legislative funding. Even in robust economic times, ABE is under-resourced in comparison to the need. In difficult economic times, the importance and value of ABE must be made clear.

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<sup>17</sup> For text of the Workforce Investment Act and a comparison to the Adult Education Act as amended by the National Literacy Act of 1991, refer to <http://www.ed.gov/policy/adulted/leg/legis.html>.

The general public needs to know that adult basic education is about basic skills, not recreational enrichment, that ABE students contribute to the economy as taxpayers and have the potential to contribute more as their literacy skills and earnings increase, and that ABE is at the cornerstone of the success of education reform, civic engagement and health care, and other pressing public policy priorities. None of us can afford to live with vast numbers of our neighbors uneducated.

*“Social-welfare programs are essentially a matter of ethics and generosity, but education and training are not. I am willing to pay for the education of my neighbor's children not because I am generous, but because I cannot afford to live with them uneducated.”*

*Professor Lester Thurow  
Mass. Institute of Technology*

## **MASSACHUSETTS CHALLENGES:**

The challenges in Massachusetts revolve around aligning ABE with the new education priorities of the Patrick Administration expressed through the Readiness Project and managed by the relatively new cabinet position of Secretary of Education, changes in the state's population demographics, and negative myths and stereotypes against immigrants.

Created by Governor Patrick's Executive Order in June of 2007, the Readiness Project is an ambitious, statewide, 10-year strategic plan for the future of education in the Commonwealth. The overall goal of this project is to create a comprehensive, child-centered public education system that begins before kindergarten, continues through grade 12 and higher education, and extends through workforce development and lifelong learning to ensure that each individual has the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential.

To realize this goal, public schools, higher education institutions, and private and community partners will need to work together to provide students with pathways to prepare for life and work and to enable the Commonwealth to be competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The specific goals of the Readiness Project<sup>18</sup> include:

- 1) To transform public education in the Commonwealth, we must meet the learning needs of each student and provide the understanding, encouragement, support, knowledge and skills each requires to exceed the state's high expectations and rigorous academic standards.
- 2) To transform public education in the Commonwealth, we must ensure that every student is taught by highly competent, well-educated, strongly supported and effective educators.
- 3) To transform public education in the Commonwealth, we must prepare every student for postsecondary education, career and lifelong economic, social and civic success.
- 4) To transform public education in the Commonwealth, we must unleash innovation and systemic change throughout the Commonwealth's schools, school districts, colleges and universities as well as in the partnerships and collaborations among education institutions, communities, businesses and nonprofits.

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<sup>18</sup> For the Readiness Project Report and more details about its specific recommendations, refer to [http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eoeterminal&L=3&L0=Home&L1=Commonwealth+Readiness+Project&L2=Readiness+Reports&sid=Eeoe&b=terminalcontent&f=readiness\\_project\\_readiness\\_final\\_report&csid=Eeoe](http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eoeterminal&L=3&L0=Home&L1=Commonwealth+Readiness+Project&L2=Readiness+Reports&sid=Eeoe&b=terminalcontent&f=readiness_project_readiness_final_report&csid=Eeoe)

As outlined in *Facing the Future* and in the Task Force’s recommendations later in this report, ABE and the Readiness Project share many of the same priorities: having high expectations and rigorous academic standards, ensuring the quality and effectiveness of teaching and teachers, preparing every student to be successful in their next steps, fostering continuous improvement and innovation, serving a diverse student body, responding to the need to develop the Commonwealth’s workforce, addressing escalating healthcare costs for teachers, supporting the importance of parents and caretakers as first teachers, forging public/private partnerships and other community collaborations, and capitalizing on the important role of the community colleges for career and lifelong learning. Finally, the Readiness Project advocates increased availability of and accessibility of state ABE and ESOL programs beginning in 2012. The challenge for ABE will be to maintain a vigorous connection to the Readiness Project and the new Secretary of Education, who will be managing the Governor’s education priorities, so that the adult students in the Commonwealth’s ABE programs will be have “the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential” in the same way that all other students have.

Population demographics and anti-immigrant sentiments also pose challenges – to the state’s workforce, its economy, and its ABE system. While increasing numbers of native-born, college-educated residents are leaving the Commonwealth, the share of immigrants in our workforce has nearly doubled over the past 25 years. In the year 2000, immigrants made up 12.2% of the Massachusetts population, up from 9.5% in 1990. Over the course of the same decade, the immigrant population in the state grew by 35%, reaching 773,000 in 2000.<sup>19</sup> Foreign immigrants were responsible for 82 percent of the net growth in the state’s civilian labor force between the mid-1980s and 1997. By 2030, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council projects that the region’s population will grow and become more diverse, with 31% of the region being black, Hispanic, Asian or another non-white race.

Immigrants to Massachusetts will have varied educational backgrounds: while some will have bachelor’s degrees and be ready for high-skill jobs; many more will have little or no education and need ESOL services.<sup>20</sup> Although nearly 30% of adult immigrants have at least a college degree, the majority of working-age immigrants who have come to the U.S. and Massachusetts in recent years have only a high school diploma or less; immigrants are more than three times as likely as native-born adults to lack a high school diploma (25% vs. 8%). Further, today’s immigrants are increasingly coming from countries where English is not the primary language. Education does make a difference to their economic prospects, though; although immigrants in Massachusetts overall have higher aggregate rates of unemployment than do native-born residents, their unemployment rates decline steadily with the years of schooling that they have completed.

This increase to immigration to Massachusetts is the sole factor offsetting our state’s population losses due to both the out-migration of professional families described above and a declining birth rate. As international immigration becomes the only compensation for this loss of population, immigrants have become an increasingly key factor in the Commonwealth’s growth. In fact, if not for increased foreign immigration, the Massachusetts population would actually be

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<sup>19</sup> *The Changing Face of Massachusetts*, MassINC, 2005 ([www.massinc.org](http://www.massinc.org))

<sup>20</sup> *Metro Future: Our Changing Population* (Trend Line #1), Metropolitan Area Planning Council ([www.metrofuture.org](http://www.metrofuture.org)).

smaller today than it was in 1970, and the New England region's labor force would actually be smaller by 200,000 people than it was in 1990. The fact that Massachusetts' labor force grew at all was a result of international immigrants who have contributed substantially to the state's economy.

Immigrants have always had an uphill battle; in the aftermath of 9/11 and in wake of a severe economic recession, all immigrants, including ESOL students, have become the victims of heightened anti-immigrant backlash and civil rights violations. These conditions pose challenges not only to the individuals and their families, but also to the community and the agencies that provide services to immigrants – including ABE programs.

#### **ADULT AND COMMUNITY LEARNING SERVICES CHALLENGES:**

As will be discussed in more detail in Section 6, *Recommendations*, there are several challenges within ACLS itself. First, hiring freezes at both the state and Department level have reduced ACLS staff by 26%. The Program Specialist team has been hardest hit, reduced to 2/3 of its normal size for more than two years. Second, there is a long-term investment in the strengths of current ABE system infrastructure, policies and procedures, which may make it more difficult to see viable alternatives. Finally, the complexity of the current system may make change difficult to envision or implement. A paradigm shift requires changes in knowledge, changes in skills, and changes in motivation. Each of these areas will need attention to bring about the changes; reduced staffing within ACLS makes it challenging to provide the attention that these changes need.

## SECTION 5: TASK FORCE CHARGE AND PROCESS FOR DELIBERATIONS

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### OVERVIEW:

The Adult Basic Education Strategic Framework Force was convened by the Adult and Community Learning Services unit of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The ambitious work of the ABE Strategic Framework Task Force was vital to ensuring that the adult basic education system could achieve the goals of *Facing the Future: the Massachusetts Strategic Framework for Adult Basic Education* and that those goals would be achieved in a way that promotes effectiveness, accountability, creativity, flexibility and efficiency.

The Task Force members were challenged to bring their individual expertise and knowledge to all deliberations while simultaneously being open to that which was outside of their direct experience. Members were cognizant of the need to think boldly about a future vision for ABE; however, current fiscal limitations often made that difficult.

***“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used to create them.”***

*Albert Einstein*

These recommendations will hopefully guide Adult Basic Education policy for more than the next Workforce Investment Act re-authorization period or the next multi-year funding cycle. The true test of both the Strategic Framework and these recommendations will be if they ultimately help improve the quality of services provided to students, become a touchstone for adult basic education, and continue to inspire adult basic education services and policy well into the future.

### CHARGE OF THE TASK FORCE:

The charge of the Task Force was multi-faceted and evolved during the process. Initially, the group was to take on the broad task of determining what’s working well in adult basic education in Massachusetts, what needs to be changed and how, the implications of change and the projected costs of change.

Even within the three goals of the Strategic Framework, it soon became clear that the group’s charge needed to become more focused so that specific and useful recommendations could be made within the timeframe of the Task Force’s existence.

As a result, the Task Force’s scope of work was refined to provide recommendations specifically regarding how best to:

- 1) Increase access to intensity of services for those who need them (addressing ABE Strategic Goal 1);
- 2) Increase regulatory flexibility and opportunities to support program innovation (addressing ABE Strategic Goal 2);
- 3) Strengthen instruction and build teacher capacity (addressing ABE Strategic Goals 2 and 3);
- 4) Expand access to counseling, to better meet the needs of ABE students (addressing ABE Strategic Goal 3).

## **PRINCIPLES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND THE TASK FORCE'S RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Several recurring principles, woven throughout the Task Force's deliberations, are important to successful implementation of both the Strategic Framework and the Task Force's recommendations. These themes are:

### **1. Focus the system on measuring outcomes that demonstrate quality, rather than on managing program components and processes to promote quality.**

The Massachusetts ABE system infrastructure is designed to provide the necessary foundation on which to build a strong, sustainable and responsive system that provides quality services and can continuously improve. However, managing the complex infrastructure and its component parts requires programs to expertly balance their limited time, staff and resources. There was strong agreement among most Task Force members that the ABE system and the services it provides could be improved by focusing more on the results that programs help their students achieve (i.e., program outcomes) and less on elements of program design. This shift would also promote flexibility, creativity and innovation.

### **2. Think beyond the confines of the fiscal year.**

Many facets of a program (e.g., student persistence, long-term student goal achievement, program development and long-term staff development) span two or more fiscal years. Program performance is currently measured on an annual basis through the SMARTT data management system, which collects data on student demographics, assessment, attendance and goal attainment required by the National Reporting System and the Department. Artificially truncating the present fiscal year from either the past or the future provides a distorted picture of what's truly happening in programs.

### **3. View programs holistically.**

A recurring theme that emerged in Task Force discussions was that the requirements of accountability and program design as currently structured do not present an integrated and holistic picture of programs, how they operate, or intended and unintended accomplishments, all to the detriment of the ABE system. A focus on outcomes instead of

processes, thinking beyond the confines of the fiscal year and promoting flexibility and innovation all lead to a holistic program view.

#### **4. Simplify.**

There was a consensus on the Task Force that program requirements in every area should be simplified and requirements prioritized to only what is absolutely essential. The Task Force urges that the system “get rid of all the little boxes.”<sup>21</sup> Demands on all staff (e.g., directors, teachers, counselors and support staff) have dramatically increased over the years, while funding and staffing have not similarly increased. Finally, in order for this transition to authentically mean a real shift in focus, the new requirements must be simple and provide autonomy and flexibility.

#### **DELIBERATIVE PROCESS:**

The Task Force met six times from December 2008 through May 2009. Meetings included discussion of materials<sup>22</sup> studied in advance, presentations by ACLS staff and Task Force members, small group discussions, large group discussions with the entire Task Force and an online Zoomerang survey of Task Force members to allow for additional input that couldn’t be provided during scheduled meetings<sup>23</sup>.

Prior to deliberations, the Task Force agreed on the criteria it would use to evaluate policy recommendations.<sup>24</sup> Decisions were made by a formal vote of the members present. In a few instances, which will be duly noted, a recommendation was discussed more than once and revised to move closer to consensus, and more than one vote was taken.

While ACLS staff attended the Task Force meetings and facilitated some of the group discussions, they limited their participation in deliberations and did not vote on any recommendations.

#### **PRESENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The next section of this report will present the recommendations voted on by the Task Force, the rationale for these recommendations and vote tallies, including reasons for abstentions and recusals, as well as any tactical recommendations for implementation. For coherence, the recommendations are organized by topic.<sup>25</sup> Majority and minority opinions will be presented when applicable.

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<sup>21</sup> Task Force members were referring to the need for less stringent policy requirements that would lead to more flexibility in program design, reporting and accountability.

<sup>22</sup> See appendix for lists of Task Force members and materials referenced by the Task Force.

<sup>23</sup> See appendix for copies of the Zoomerang surveys (Parts I and II). Please note that the survey questions were drafted by ACLS staff to propose ideas and capture other ideas that percolated during Task Force deliberations but for which there was no formal vote.

<sup>24</sup> See appendix for Criteria for Evaluating Policy Recommendations, Massachusetts ABE Strategic Task Force, 2009.

<sup>25</sup> See appendix for list of recommendations and vote tallies.



## SECTION 6: TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

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### **STRATEGIC GOAL 1:**

*Ensure that adults needing basic education have access to services.*

The ABE system serves the most educationally disadvantaged adults and accepts students regardless of skill, income, the amount of instructional time that would be needed to meet stated goals, or age (provided the individual is over age 16 and out-of-school as required by the federal Workforce Investment Act). Although the ABE system provides the most universal access of any public education or training program for adults, there are as many adults currently waiting for services as there are enrolled in classes. While many adult learners are working, and have limited hours available to pursue their educational goals, there are others who could progress more quickly if more instructional hours were available to them.

The ABE system is committed to ensuring that any adult who needs basic education has the opportunity to further his or her education, including the most in need. In order to accomplish this goal, the Task Force examined ways to increase the intensity of service and access to intensive services as well as provide support for programs that successfully address challenges in serving diverse and often difficult-to-serve populations.

#### ***TASK FORCE AREA OF FOCUS I:***

#### **INCREASE ACCESS TO INTENSIVE SERVICES FOR THOSE WHO NEED THEM:**

- 1. The Task Force recommends that the provision of intensive instructional services be linked to demonstrated need in the community.**

The urgency to increase intensity of instruction<sup>26</sup> is in response to the needs of students in the current economic climate. Providing more instructional hours within a shorter time span could allow students to gain skills and move more rapidly to next steps – enroll in college or a job-training program, or complete a training program and obtain a much-needed job. People on the wait list can then move into the recently vacated class slot more quickly. Intensity can benefit not only the students receiving instruction; it can help increase access for those who are waiting.

Conversely, both the difficult job market and the complexities of an adult's life can undermine a student's best intentions to attend more class hours. As can be expected, students will work overtime, by choice or by necessity, or accept a temporary work assignment to earn money instead of attending class. Family and everyday responsibilities can also interfere with the ability to attend more hours.

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<sup>26</sup> ACLS defines intensive instruction as a class that meets a minimum of 9 hours per week. Refer to [www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.asp?id=4756](http://www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.asp?id=4756) for more detail.



Nevertheless, the Task Force overwhelmingly supported this proposal to link intensive services to community need. There was a cautionary note from one member that was echoed throughout the recommendations for intensity: no programs should be penalized for offering services of lower intensity.

### ***Strategies for Recommendation #1:***

Several of the recommended strategies propose flexibility in how programs design their services to meet student and community need, and how programs internally allocate their resources to be responsive to those needs.

- **The Task Force recommends encouraging partnerships that increase instructional intensity through collaborations with workforce development partners and/or other appropriate entities in the community.**

The ABE system is an essential and integral component of the workforce development system. ABE provides adults with the basic skills they need to enroll in job training programs, successfully complete them and take advantage of career advancement opportunities. There is no question that the proficiency gained by undereducated adults through the ABE system is a pre-requisite to their qualifying for even the most basic training, further education and better jobs. Neither ABE nor workforce development can excel in fully meeting the educational and training needs of the individual student/client or employer alone.<sup>27</sup>

Task Force members viewed collaborating with workforce development partners as “the wave of the future.” Two members believed that, if increased class hours are important, we should include other community partners as well who might be able to assist in this endeavor.

- **The Task Force recommends relaxing the 20% cap on non-rates based classes to increase intensity, with strengthened expectations and accountability for attendance and average attended hours.**

There was significant support for this strategy despite the need to clarify the accountability outcomes. Currently, 80% of instructional funding in each Community Adult Learning Center grant is generated by rate-based classes, and a maximum of 20% of the instructional funding may support optional, non-rate based classes. The primary purposes of non-rate based classes are 1) to provide supplemental instruction (e.g., computer instruction) to students enrolled in a rate-based class (e.g., basic literacy, ABE, ESOL, pre-ASE and ASE services) or 2) to provide instruction to targeted populations through stand-alone non-rate based classes (e.g., students in need of short-term instruction in order to pass the GED tests). Non-rates based classes are exempt from some program planning requirements and, as a result, allow for more flexibility to

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<sup>27</sup> *A White Paper: The Importance of the Adult Basic Education System to Workforce Development*, MA Coalition for Adult Education, Public Policy Committee, 2006.

respond to student needs. Relaxing the 20% cap on non-rates based classes would allow even more flexibility to use additional resources to offer more intensity of instruction.

Although there were abstentions because Task Force members either needed more information or were unclear about specifics of the recommendation (e.g., What are “strengthened expectations?”), the lone “no” vote questioned the connection between increased intensity and accountability for attendance and average attended hours. If the purpose of increased intensity is as stated above – to move through the ABE system and transition to next steps more quickly depending on the student’s goal – then it seems the accountability for outcomes as a result of increased intensity should not be attendance, but should be centered on the student, the student’s progress, educational gain and achievement of the student’s goal, which could include a successful transition to “next steps”. The focus on attendance and average attended hours captures the “input” of attendance, but does not capture the desired “outcome” of a successful transition or goal attainment.

**The Task Force recommends freeing up resources for more intensive services by waiving the required 2 to 4 weeks of pre-/post-planning, if those resources are re-directed to class time.**

The majority of Task Force members endorsed this change in the program-planning schema as an additional way to provide more intensive services by allowing more flexibility in planning requirements. However, some members advocated even more flexibility: let programs decide how to free up resources at their program, and they might choose some other mechanism instead of eliminating the pre-/post-planning weeks; let programs decide how to use any resources they are able to free up and they might choose to use those resources for transitions or to address another local need.

One member believed that more experienced programs might not need the same amount of planning time as less experienced programs and could benefit from the freed up resources. Some members were concerned that, without planning time, programs would lose an important aspect of program development. The different levels of skill and experience among programs make it logical to allow the flexibility advocated for some of the Task Force members.

- **The Task Force recommends freeing up resources for more intensive services by allowing programs flexibility with community planning money<sup>28</sup>.**

Task Force members were more willing to re-direct community planning money than they were to waive the required 2 to 4 weeks of pre-/post-planning time, and the recommendation engendered strong comments on both sides of the vote. One member who voted “no” stated <sup>29</sup>:

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<sup>28</sup> For information on the Community Planning Initiative of Adult and Community Learning Services at the MA Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education, refer to [www.doe.mass.edu/acls/cp](http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/cp).

<sup>29</sup> Throughout this report, there will be quotes such as this one from comments made by Task Force members either during meetings or from the Zoomerang survey responses.

*Community planning is important and should not be cut. It is the mechanism through which our programs are attempting to create a system for ABE state wide.*

A member who voted “yes” stated:

*I think community planning is important but “overdone”!!!*

Members even had different views on whether or not well-established community planning groups would need the resources. One member felt the resources would be needed to continue strong partnerships that have been built over the years while another believed that most community planning groups are well underway and may not require as much funding now. Again, as with other recommendations, members wanted flexibility to use the money for community planning or re-direct the funds to increase intensity or to meet another student need.

- **The Task Force recommends revisiting the relative weight of performance points for attendance and average attended hours to encourage more intensity.**

As part of a commitment to provide ABE students with high quality services, ABE programs funded by ESE are annually awarded program performance points as part of program development, continuous improvement and program evaluation, as well as when their applications are scored during the open and competitive funding process. The points are based on their past performance in the following areas: student participation (attendance and average attended hours), retention, (the percent of pre-tested students who persisted long enough to be post-tested), and results (student gains on standardized tests, setting and meeting student-identified goals, and completion of educational levels under the National Reporting System mandated by Title II of the federal Workforce Investment Act). The performance standards and points system, as one part of a larger system of accountability, were created to encourage continuous improvement, effective program administration and positive student outcomes.<sup>30</sup>

Task Force members pointed out that the “attendance” performance measure may serve as an unintended disincentive to designing programs with more intensive instruction. Since the “attendance” measure is derived by dividing the total hours of student attendance by the total planned hours of student attendance, the more planned hours in the equation, the lower the quotient will be. Therefore, if there is any chance that students are unable to attend more hours of instruction, a program design that offers a more intensive program by increasing the number of planned hours may actually lower the actual attendance score the program receives. Since the “average attended hours” measure, on the contrary, is derived by dividing the total student instructional hours of

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<sup>30</sup> For more information on the Performance Standards for the Adult and Community Learning Services of the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, refer to [www.doe.mass.edu/acls/pawg](http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/pawg).

attendance by the total number of students, this measure would not be affected by increasing the number of instructional hours planned.

If ACLS were to assign less “weight” to the “attendance” measure, and more to the “average attended hours” measure, programs may be less concerned about the impact that planning more instructional hours may have on their performance points. On the other hand, Task Force members also expressed concern that changing the weight in this way, in order to promote intensity through performance points, may favor large, more intensive programs, and that smaller, less intensive programs – even those that provide high quality targeted services – could be penalized for such a program design even when it meets the needs of learners who are not able to attend more intensive instruction. There was also an observation that connecting intensity to performance points might discourage programs from experimenting with different strategies to increase intensity if it could affect their performance.

- **The Task Force recommends promoting the inclusion of some aspect of distance learning in programs to increase intensity and to continue to serve students who need to “stop out”.**<sup>31</sup>

The Task Force supported encouraging distance learning as a way to increase access and serve those who “stop out,” although it was suggested that it be incorporated into a broader, strategic recommendation regarding persistence. It was noted that this strategy often fails with populations with low levels of education and might have minimal utility for low-level ESOL students, as their distance learning options are limited. There were the recurring issues of resources for implementation as well as allowing programs the flexibility to decide how best to increase intensity and persistence.

**2. The Task Force recommends exploring a policy for providing services to address the needs of high level ESOL students with a Student Performance Level (SPL) 7 and above.**<sup>32</sup>

Currently, there is a tremendous service gap for ESOL students as they reach SPL 7. While their conversation skills have improved, their reading and writing skills often lag behind and are not sufficient to allow them to transition to study for the GED, enroll in higher education or job training or resume the careers they had in their native countries. Task Force members described the predicament as “a dead ender for many students”, a “huge gap” and “a major barrier to supporting student transitions to next steps.” There was a strong consensus for Recommendation

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<sup>31</sup> As opposed to the term “drop out” used to describe when a student leaves a program and does not return, “stop out” is used to describe when a student leaves the program for an undefined period of time and then returns.

<sup>32</sup> Student Performance Level (SPL) is the listening and oral comprehension functioning levels for an ESOL student. SPL levels range from 0 (beginning ESL literacy) to 10 (native English speaker). For more information, refer to [www.cal.org/caela/tools/program\\_development/elltoolkit/oldpdfs/Part4-5.pdf](http://www.cal.org/caela/tools/program_development/elltoolkit/oldpdfs/Part4-5.pdf).

#2 although one member cautioned against creating a solution that would take resources from ABE/Pre-ASE services.

**STRATEGIC GOAL 2:**  
***Increase system effectiveness and quality.***

***TASK FORCE AREA OF FOCUS II:***

**INCREASE REGULATORY FLEXIBILITY AND OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT PROGRAM INNOVATION:**

- 3. The Task Force recommends a greater focus on outcomes that demonstrate quality rather than on processes intended to promote quality.**
- 4. The Task Force recommends adoption of the Service Plan Model.**

The design of the ESE-funded ABE system is based on guidelines and requirements promulgated by ACLS, in part, through *Guidelines for Effective Adult Basic Education* and *The Massachusetts Indicators of Program Quality*<sup>33</sup>. The guidelines, based on ABE provider input, research and data, outline the essential program components and processes that constitute effective ABE services in the following categories: core student services, optional program services (e.g., services to the homeless, family literacy, health education and volunteer tutoring), program and staff development, and administration. The *Massachusetts Indicators of Program Quality*, created under federal mandate and developed together with the field, form the basis for the ACLS monitoring team visit process and address the following areas: curriculum and instruction, student educational progress, support services, community linkages, program continuous improvement planning, professional development, program management and leadership, and accountability. The ABE Rates System provides assurance that all components are adequately funded.

Weaving together these design components, processes and performance standards requires expertly balancing all the pieces, and can inadvertently leave less room for innovation and flexibility than is needed to most effectively serve the needs of the students.

Recommendation #3 articulates the Task Force's strong endorsement for evaluating programs on the results they help their students achieve (i.e., program outcomes) instead of enforcing specific elements of program design. In short, the vision is to focus on demonstrating the quality outcomes, not on managing the processes.

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<sup>33</sup>See [www.doe.mass.edu/acls](http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls) for more information on these documents and other components of the ABE system, including accountability, assessment and the SMARTT data management system.

Recommendation #4 to adopt the proposed “service plan model”<sup>34</sup> would implement this vision. Currently, the ABE system is predicated on a “class plan model” that focuses heavily on the structural elements and processes of a program as outlined in the *Guidelines for Effective Adult Basic Education* and the *Massachusetts Indicators of Program Quality*.

Under the class plan model of design, programs create and submit a program design to ACLS for approval, based on the assessed needs of the community and target population, together with a budget based on the cost per class. The cost per class is dependent upon the teacher to student ratio in the class, the projected number of student instructional hours to be provided, and the cost per student instructional hour established by ACLS (i.e., the “rate”). The established rate also incorporates costs associated with the requirements outlined in the *Guidelines for Effective Adult Basic Education* and other policy directives such as those for counseling, assessment and administrative functions.

In the ideal, creating a program using the class plan model of design focuses attention on the required infrastructure, processes and procedures emanating from state policies that are intended to promote quality as well as the rates that are intended to support the costs associated with those policies. In practice, program directors on the task force expressed the view that this focus on program infrastructure results in the state micromanaging local providers.

The service plan model proposes a shift in the balance of staff time and attention toward the *program outcomes* by giving programs the flexibility to manage their resources to best meet the needs of the students and the community. The Service Plan model proposes that the Department continue to use the ABE Rates System to calculate the grant amount that each program would be eligible to receive. Upon receiving the grant, program directors would have the flexibility and responsibility to prioritize student and community needs and allocate the funding received under the rates in a way that best provides what the students and the community need. Thus, rates would be used “to fund programs, not decide how to run them”.

Under the service plan model, important structural components would be ensured through the Statement of Assurances signed by funded programs. Program outcomes and output data would continue to be used to gauge effectiveness and quality, and student persistence and outcomes would be tracked across fiscal years to provide a true picture of student retention and progress.

***“Our system is fundamentally shaped by how we translate what we value into practice. We know that the strain on resources requires prioritization of how we spend our funding, our time, and our attention.”***

*Service Plan Model Presentation  
by Jim Ayres, Linda Braun,  
Luanne Teller and Sally Waldron*

Other envisioned advantages to shifting to a service plan model include:

- 1) The planning process would be simpler and more flexible.
- 2) Programs would be more responsive and more student-centered.
- 3) The Statement of Assurances and Continuous Improvement Plans, both documents required for funding, would become more integrated and relevant to

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<sup>34</sup> See appendix for the Service Plan Model as presented to the Task Force.

program planning, the provision of services and accountability. (*ACLS Note: ACLS views these two documents as very different, with very different purposes. The Statement of Assurances is not a program planning document, and the two documents were never intended to be integrated.*)

- 4) Increased flexibility would allow programs to more easily partner with the workforce development system by providing more varied instructional offerings that can be scheduled according to the students' needs.

As evidenced by the affirmative votes, the Task Force strongly endorsed the Service Plan Model. The one abstention was from a member who needed more information before casting a vote; the sole refusal was from a non-ACLS member who funded ABE programs and felt it was inappropriate to vote.

#### ***Strategies for Recommendation #4:***

- **The Task Force recommends under the Service Plan Model that student outcomes and persistence be tracked within and across fiscal years.**
- **The Task Force recommends that ACLS work with the Massachusetts ABE Directors' Council to further explore the Service Plan Model recommendation and its implications for implementation.**

Pursuit of this model does raise questions, including but not limited to how program monitoring would change, how new programs would be supported -- especially if they need more assistance developing the structural elements involved in operating a program -- and how special populations will be served. These questions and others can be addressed through collaborative work conducted by ACLS and the Massachusetts ABE Directors' Council.

Perhaps the most profound consequence of this shift in focus could be a move toward performance-based funding, which rewards programs that meet or exceed their planned outcomes and sanctions programs that don't. Two members had concerns about the changing focus. One advocated a balance between process inputs and program outcomes so as to not have too much emphasis on performance-based evaluation. Programs are understandably wary about being sanctioned for not meeting outcomes due to circumstances beyond their control, for example, the force "majeure" of complex adult lives and difficult economic circumstances. Another member was concerned about "creaming" and bypassing those adults who are hard to serve in an effort to avoid the risk of sanctions.

Certain principles should be considered during any transition from the class plan model of design to the service plan model of design, or from the current funding model to a performance-based model of funding. The transition should be gradual and not precipitous so as to not disrupt services. The risk to program funding continuity during the transition needs to be minimized, and programs need a sufficient amount of time to re-engineer themselves. Resources need to be available for the program and staff

development support that will help programs to successfully do that re-engineering. Finally, in order for this transition to authentically mean a real shift in focus, the new requirements must be simple and provide autonomy and flexibility for programs and their staffs.

The Task Force also discussed other strategies that would provide programs with more flexibility.

*Additional strategies to promote regulatory flexibility:*

- **The Task Force recommends allowing flexibility in staff development hours to allow local directors to assign it to staff who most need it.**

The Task Force unanimously endorsed this concept. Based, as one member said, on “common sense,” the recommendation allows program directors to provide staff development opportunities based on the needs of the staff, and not treat all staff the same regardless of their knowledge, experience, expertise and needs.

- **The Task Force recommends allowing more flexibility in allowable staff salary rates than the existing 6% range (+/-3%).**

Members are in favor of giving programs some flexibility with regard to salaries. Currently, grant funds may only cover salaries within a range from 3% below the salary levels supported in the ABE Rates System to 3% above those salary levels. Programs with union contracts that are obligated to pay more than 3% above the salary levels supported in the Rates are required to pay difference with matching funds. Programs want and need the flexibility from staff person to staff person within a staffing category. Two members would like to see a higher base pay to attract and retain qualified staff. Funding for this increased flexibility in the salary rate is a concern since the cost implications are not known.

- **The Task Force recommends allowing programs to pool rate-based resources intended to support counseling, intake, assessment, program development, staff development, community planning and data entry and to decide locally, each year, how much to spend on each component.**

While the Task Force did not support the pooling at the state level of rate-based resources for these functions, it did support the concept at the local program level. This recommendation reinforces the notion of local flexibility and decision-making and, in the spirit of the service plan model, this local control and flexibility does not undermine accountability for outcomes. Two members stated that the ability to pool funds could encourage inter-agency collaboration and economies of scale.

With respect to the maintenance of effort requirement, one member wanted to keep the existing mandates in force to ensure that these functions would be adequately funded, to have a cost guideline for budgeting purposes, and to be able to resist internal agency pressure to minimize or eliminate some cost categories altogether in favor of others. On



the opposite side, another member believes programs should be empowered to take the ESE funding and allocate it where it's needed, so that budgets are real documents that serve a programmatic purpose.

### **STRATEGIC GOAL 3:**

***Prepare students for success in their next steps:  
In college and further training, at work, and in the community.***

#### ***TASK FORCE AREA OF FOCUS III:***

#### **STRENGTHEN INSTRUCTION AND BUILD TEACHER CAPACITY (OVERLAPS STRATEGIC GOALS 2 AND 3):**

Massachusetts promotes teacher quality through a well-developed professional development system called SABES (System for Adult Basic Education Support)<sup>35</sup>, as well as a process for voluntary ABE teacher licensure, and professional standards for teachers, which define the pedagogical and professional skills and knowledge required for ABE teachers.<sup>36</sup>

Even though there is currently no statewide minimum degree or license required to teach in an ESE-funded ABE program, virtually all teachers hold at least a four-year degree. In fiscal year 2008, 93% of all teachers in ESE-funded programs held a minimum of a bachelor's degree and 48% held a master's degree. Also in fiscal year 2008, 63% of teachers in the Massachusetts ABE system held one or more professional teaching licenses: 10% held licenses in ESOL, 5% in ABE, 2% in math, 1% in reading and 47% in other areas.<sup>37</sup> Even without statewide requirements, the local hiring criteria established by the ABE providers, at their own discretion, have set high standards.

The rationale for developing minimum statewide teacher requirements is driven by several factors:

- 1) the need to make ABE curriculum and instruction more rigorous to better prepare students, especially in math and science and for next steps, and ensure that teachers have the minimum qualifications needed to meet this challenge;
- 2) the need to professionalize the ABE teaching profession in order to attract and retain qualified new teachers to this career as ABE's aging workforce retires; and,
- 3) the need to set minimum professional qualifications as a precursor to improving working conditions.

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<sup>35</sup> For more information, refer to [www.sabes.org](http://www.sabes.org).

<sup>36</sup> For information on ABE teacher licensure and professional standards for teachers, go to [www.doe.mass.edu/acls/pd](http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/pd).

<sup>37</sup> MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Adult and Community Learning Services, 2008.

While the professional standards for teachers define the subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills required of ABE teachers, the Task Force grappled with the credentials that ABE teachers should possess to meet the challenges noted above.

The Task Force agreed that there should be statewide minimum requirements for ABE teachers, and settled on a four-year degree as something almost everyone could agree on. However, the debate over what the minimum requirements should be and whether to allow a waiver was difficult to resolve, and the Task Force members voted multiple times on several proposals to address these issues.

**5. The Task Force recommends that every ABE classroom teacher be required to have a four-year degree and that a waiver be allowed.**

***Strategy for Recommendation #5:***

- The Task Force recommends that ACLS work with the Massachusetts ABE Directors' Council to further explore waivers of the bachelor's degree requirement for current and future staff.

While 93% of ABE teachers in fiscal year 2008 held a bachelor's degree even without a statewide requirement, the Task Force formally re-affirmed this standard as an important priority that should be maintained. In an effort to establish a minimum credential while also ensuring that programs had local flexibility, one proposal required programs to maintain the statewide average of teachers with a bachelor's degree in hiring and maintaining a teaching staff. Programs would also be allowed to file an automatic waiver with a compelling rationale if they needed to deviate from that percentage. There were several votes on this proposal, but none captured a significant majority. Members were concerned that this compromise between a minimum requirement and a waiver doesn't raise the bar, that it will be difficult to encourage programs to hire candidates with a bachelor's degree if the state average begins to fall without making it a requirement, and that in smaller programs the current state average is akin to a 100% requirement, and that ultimately the proposal has unlimited exemptions that are subjective.

After further discussions about waivers for future hires and "grandfathering" exemptions for current staff, which were inconclusive, the group again addressed the issue of a four-year degree and a waiver with a more affirmative vote on Recommendation #5. This endorsement perhaps indicates that members were willing to compromise and support a waiver, but were unsure of the appropriate waiver process or criteria.

The minority who was not in favor of the bachelor's degree requirement believed that such a requirement would prevent competent and effective individuals from teaching (e.g., program alumnae who would make excellent role models for current students, or individuals with degrees from other countries), and that the true criteria for being a successful teacher is possessing the appropriate skills, knowledge and abilities to teach the subject matter in question.

Given the relatively low teacher compensation in some sectors of ABE, the requirement for a bachelor's degree could also make it difficult to recruit teachers in a robust economy as well as make it more difficult to achieve staff diversity.

In light of these factors, the Task Force voted affirmatively for Recommendation #5 as a way to require a bachelor's degree but also allow programs to have local hiring flexibility, which would address the concerns of those who held the minority view.

**6. The Task Force recommends that ABE Teacher Licensure remain voluntary.**

The voluntary ABE Teacher Licensure was established by state legislation in 1998 with specific regulations subsequently promulgated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Candidates can pursue the ABE Teacher's License through four pathways, based on their prior experience, education, and credentials held. Requirements include a bachelor's or a master's degree, a passing score on the Communications and Literacy Skills Test, and a passing score on the ABE subject matter test – the first test of its kind in the nation introduced in 2004. Licenses must be renewed every five years.

With Recommendation #6, the Task Force re-affirmed the current policy that ABE Teacher Licensure should remain voluntary. While specific recommendations regarding licensure are beyond the purview of this Task Force, some members encouraged that the requirements and pathways for pursuit of a license be simplified.

**7. The Task Force recommends the use of content specialists to strengthen instruction and build teacher capacity.**

To help ABE teachers meet the challenges of effectively teaching a more rigorous curriculum, the Task Force discussed the concept of content specialists<sup>38</sup> who would be available to provide staff development in specific subject areas.

The group discussed the advantages and disadvantages of stationing the content specialists either in regional SABES centers or in the individual ABE programs. The concept of locating reading, math and learning disabilities specialists in the SABES centers as a more cost-efficient way to deploy resources was supported in a preliminary vote, and the vote to locate content specialists of any kind in the SABES centers gained more support in a second vote. The minority view

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<sup>38</sup> Individuals would be specialists in content areas such as reading, math, ESOL, learning disabilities and other needed subjects. One Task Force member suggested specialists in other areas as well such as citizenship, volunteer services and the homeless.

preferred to station the content specialists at individual programs as a way of building long-term program capacity, while the majority believed this alternative was not financially feasible. In addition to a concern that placing content specialists at SABES centers was also not financially feasible, it could likely mean replacing almost all of the current SABES staff who have not been hired based on their specialization in a particular content area.<sup>39</sup> Regardless of the location, the Task Force strongly endorsed the use of content specialists to help programs meet the students' need for more rigorous curriculum.

**8. The Task Force recommends establishing minimum qualifications for content specialists who provide staff development expertise and support to teaching staff.**

Unlike the debate regarding minimum requirements for teachers, the Task Force overwhelmingly endorsed minimum qualifications for content specialists who would be providing support and expertise to other staff. There were two votes, one at the April 2009 meeting and the re-affirming Zoomerang vote noted above. There was one dissenting vote by a Task Force member who would support the recommendation if there were a corresponding funding mechanism identified to support it.

Since 1990, ACLS has been committed to ensuring professional staff development for ABE teachers and staff through SABES, which promotes high quality adult basic education services through training, support, and resources that improve the skills and knowledge of practitioners and strengthen programs. Current program guidelines require that ABE staff dedicate 2.5% of their paid staff time annually to some form of professional development activities and that programs dedicate 3.5% of total paid staff time annually to program development activities.<sup>40</sup> The ABE Rates System builds financial support for these activities into program grants.

**9. The Task Force recommends adequate funding and increased flexibility for SABES to respond to emerging program needs.**

***Strategies for Recommendation #9:***

As evidenced by the endorsement of Recommendation #9, Task Force members supported staff development and the need for SABES. However, they also stated that SABES needs increased flexibility so that it is not required to offer specific trainings during the year and can instead respond to the evolving needs of programs and their staff. Task Force members also suggested

<sup>39</sup> Current statewide efforts in math reflect a content specialist model: a math specialist based at the SABES Central Resource Center coordinates math training statewide by working with math specialists/leaders in each of the regions who, while based in a particular program, provide trainings for the region as a whole.

<sup>40</sup> For more information, refer to [www.doe.mass.edu/acls/pd](http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/pd).

partnerships with colleges as a way to offer staff development courses and access different expertise, and online courses and webinars as a way to take advantage of available technology.

- **The Task Force recommends that new trainings recommended by the Task Force not be mandatory unless additional funds are either specifically made available for this purpose and/or released by making other present requirements voluntary.<sup>41</sup>**

The Task Force overwhelmingly supported the concept of no unfunded training mandates for staff through a vote at the February 2009 meeting and re-confirmed that support through the above vote on the Zoomerang survey.

- **The Task Force recommends asking programs to describe their professional development plans to build teacher capacity linked to either the program planning/service planning time frame (spring) or to the continuous improvement planning time frame (fall).**

While affirmatively endorsed by the Task Force with no major objections, this recommendation is more tactical in nature and as one member commented:

*This is an area where I believe programs should have more discretion and not have a prescribed timeframe and/or context.*

**10. The Task Force recommends that the state funding allocation for ABE keep pace with rising personnel and operational costs (e.g., the cost of living, educational materials, energy, health insurance, rent and utilities, student transportation and staff travel).**

The Task Force discussed the challenge to professionalize the ABE teaching profession in order to attract and retain qualified new teachers to an ABE career. Providers of ABE services are often reluctant to raise this issue, which can appear self-serving to policy makers and those who allocate financial resources to ABE programs. However, the issue of qualified ABE program staff, especially teachers, reaches everyone's core concern – the ability to teach and prepare students so they can achieve their goals and be successful in whatever they choose to pursue after leaving ABE programs.

#### ***Strategies for Recommendation #10:***

- **The Task Force recommends pursuing options for accessing health insurance for staff at ESE-funded programs via a group pool.**

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<sup>41</sup> The areas for the new trainings that were discussed were: to develop staff capacity to align curriculum and instruction with the content standards of the ABE Curriculum Frameworks and contextualize curriculum in relationship to student goals, and either a counselor track in the New Staff Orientation or a separate orientation for counselors.

The cost of providing health insurance for staff is crushing program budgets and usurping resources that could be used to provide services. An ability to buy into a statewide, group pool that meets the minimum standards of the new state healthcare law could significantly mitigate this financial stress on programs and help attract and retain qualified staff.

**11. The Task Force recommends that the ESE salary rates be increased annually by the percentage of the cost of living index.**

Task Force members were well aware that such a strategy would be difficult to implement in the current economic climate and the difficult state budget decisions that face legislators. However, with a view toward the long-term future of the ABE workforce that is aging and retiring, salaries and benefits that are less competitive than those of other educational sectors, increased turnover, and the need to attract and retain qualified staff, the rates need to be adjusted to reflect the true costs of operating a program.

Both issues, increasing the rates and providing affordable health insurance, went directly to the heart of providing adequate working conditions for the ABE workforce and the ability to sustain that workforce into the future.

**12. The Task Force recommends that ACLS work with the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education, the Massachusetts ABE Directors' Council, ABE providers and stakeholders to develop strategies to increase full-time positions.**

The Task Force discussed the use of full-time teaching positions to strengthen instruction as well as some options for creating more full-time positions. There were diverse opinions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of moving toward more full-time ABE teaching positions. Some believe that more full-time positions would attract and retain staff who will make ABE a long-term or life-long career choice, thereby leading to more experienced teachers, higher retention rates, more program continuity, more program stability and leadership, and ultimately higher quality instruction.

However, there are those who do not believe that full-time positions automatically engender quality. They are concerned that a push for more full-time positions would curtail the program's vital ability to have flexibility – the flexibility to design a program that is responsive to the needs of the students and based on the resources of the community, and the flexibility to make local hiring decisions to support the program design. The dilemma simply put is: what if a community can only support a part-time program? Will the community be penalized if full-time positions are to become the preferred program design?

While the issue was an important priority for the Task Force, time constraints made it impossible to fully discuss the complexities involved, and it was the consensus of the group that the best disposition was to recommend further discussion and investigation by practitioners, stakeholders and those entities that have been studying the issue: the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education and the Massachusetts ABE Directors' Council.

***TASK FORCE AREA OF FOCUS IV:***

**EXPAND ACCESS TO COUNSELING, TO BETTER MEET THE NEEDS OF ABE STUDENTS:**

The topic of counseling<sup>42</sup> is complex and permeated the Task Force's deliberations. Task Force members agreed that ABE students are entitled to quality support and advising related but not limited to the following areas:

- 1) Participation (e.g., attendance, persistence);
- 2) Referrals (e.g., education, health, social services, career centers);
- 3) Transitions to next steps (e.g., job training, post-secondary education, careers); and
- 4) Setting and meeting academic goals.

**13. The Task Force recommends focusing counseling on transition planning beginning with student intake and continuing throughout the student's enrollment in the program.**

Under this recommendation, counseling/advising, especially transition planning, would be a program-level priority integrated throughout program services, similar to how the correctional system prioritizes re-integration into the community after release. With this new approach, transition planning is pursued holistically in the spirit of the service plan model, is not isolated by staff member or separated by staff function, and is embraced by all staff.

***Strategies for Recommendation #13:***

- **The Task Force recommends expanding the counseling role to include more case management and career counseling.**
- **The Task Force recommends requiring programs to develop transition strategies and pathways for both college-bound and non-degree bound students (e.g., job placement/job development) through collaborations.**

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<sup>42</sup> Although the terms "counseling" and "counselor" are used to describe the functions and staff at an ABE program, they can connote a clinical mental health specialty with specific degree and licensing qualifications. While the Task Force recommends the terms "advising" and "advisor", this report will use "counseling/counselor" and "advising/advisor" interchangeably, recognizing that the former are currently most commonly used and recognized.

- **The Task Force recommends that the counselor’s role include working closely with the teacher to help contextualize the curriculum around student goals.**
- **The Task Force recommends that the counselor’s role include helping the students develop the skills needed to utilize and benefit from job placement services available at the career center.**
- **The Task Force recommends increasing resources for a “next steps” counseling function (e.g., career and educational counseling).**
- **The Task Force recommends that the amount of funding allocated for counseling be based on the total number of students, rather than the total number of student instructional hours.**
- **The Task Force recommends looking into whether public school dollars follow a high school drop-out to the ABE program in any other states, and whether this could happen in Massachusetts.**

These strategies all advocate for an expanded role for the counselor to encompass transition planning for the duration of the student’s time in the program, more case management and career counseling, working with teachers to contextualize curriculum based on student goals, and helping the students develop the skills needed to utilize and benefit from job placement services available at the career center. Such an increase in responsibilities raises numerous issues:

### **1. A resource issue:**

With existing resources and those expected to be available in the near future, small and large programs alike would be severely under-resourced to provide these services themselves, even if students need them. High schools with per student allocations substantially higher than that of ABE are not able to provide case management, transitions counseling or career counseling to all students who need it. If more counseling must be integrated into programs, what will be sacrificed instead? These competing priorities can perhaps best be expressed by comments made by two Task Force members:

*“Counselors in ABE programs are student advocates; they link the student to the teacher and provide vital services that promote learner persistence and retention.”*

*“Counseling is very important but not more important than instruction. I feel that if we increase the counseling role to include increased roles for the counselor, we will be taking away from necessary instructional hours. Yes, increase the role of counselors once we receive additional funding.”*



Three of the strategies address the pervasive issue of resources. It's true that Task Force members recognize that more funding should be provided to support the expanded responsibilities of the counselors and the requirement for developing transition strategies for students to avoid the untenable position of imposing unfunded mandates. At the same time, the desire to increase funding for "next steps" counseling functions is moderated by the reality of limited resources, and the concern that this would have a negative impact on other important counseling roles and class slots.

There was support to base the funding allocated for counseling on the total number of students rather than the total number of instructional hours. Members stated it was more fair and realistic to deal with "people" as opposed to instructional hours, since hours of attendance have no relationship to the complexity or severity of issues that are in a student's life and affecting their persistence. Resources were again in question; since there was no proposal for an actual formula, it was impossible to compare how expensive the recommended change would be compared with the current method of allocation.

The Task Force was in favor of exploring the possibility of public school dollars following a high school drop-out to the ABE program as a possible significant, new resource for ABE, citing Vermont's policy. One member cautioned about unintended consequences that may also follow the money, but still felt it was worth consideration.

## **2. A staff development issue:**

The broadened counselor responsibilities demand an array of skills, which could be different from the skills that counselors currently possess. Additional staff development will be necessary over time in order to enhance counselors' skills and successfully implement these recommendations. Staff development also costs money.

## **3. A collaborations issue:**

Partnerships and collaborations at the local and state level were suggested as ways to connect students to needed counseling services provided by others outside of the program as a way of circumventing the finance problem. While collaborations could certainly be effective in obtaining services and containing costs, what happens if other agencies have more prospective clients than they can already serve or are facing similar or worse financial situations and are unable to broaden their client base to include referrals from ABE programs? What happens to programs in areas where there are insufficient social service resources and consequently no potential or appropriate collaborators? The lack of available partners is particularly daunting for the recommendation, which would require programs to develop transition strategies and pathways specifically through collaborations.

While all of these issues are significant, under the service plan model, the impact of the expanded roles for the counselors could possibly be mitigated. Rather than be concerned that counselors are being asked to undertake too many responsibilities, counseling issues would be prioritized at the program level, based on the students' needs, and all staff would share the responsibility.

### ***Additional counseling strategy:***

- **The Task Force recommends the provision of mentoring, both for students transitioning to jobs and for students who transition to post-secondary education.**

The proposal for mentoring had significantly less support than the other counseling recommendations. Members abstained because they either needed more information about what mentoring could be in an ABE program or felt the topic needed more discussion.

Among those who voted “yes,” one member suggested that volunteers and program alumnae could be the backbone of a mentoring program; another echoed the use of volunteers especially because public dollars were limited. However, the resource issue is still a factor. ABE programs don’t have the funding for staff to supervise more than a few mentoring volunteers at a program. Recruiting, training, supervising, and managing volunteers does not happen without an investment of staff time and resources. Volunteers are not free.

Among those who voted “no,” the issues were similar to those expressed above: a lack of resources and the suggestion to provide mentoring through collaborations with local agencies and colleges rather than directly by the program itself.

### ***Transition:***

Several of the strategies focus on transition, a priority area for ACLS, which includes ABE Transition to Community College programs currently sited at twelve community colleges. The spotlight on transition is also in alignment with the recommendations made by the Adult Basic Education/English to Speakers of Other Languages Committee of the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board to improve linkages to post-secondary education, training and employment and to support educational counseling, job coaching and transition counseling.<sup>43</sup>

***“ABE programs need to be a step toward something and not a resting place.”***

*A Strategic Task Force Member*

Task Force members believed that beginning transition counseling when a student first enrolls in the program will:

- 1) allow staff to pinpoint weak academic areas that need remediation much earlier in the process;
- 2) improve retention and lead to positive outcomes by providing continuous support rather than support at transition points when students usually drop out;
- 3) give students a boost by helping the growing number of students who need to plan for next steps after leaving the ABE program; and,
- 4) promote a process of lifelong learning.

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<sup>43</sup> Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board. *Report of the Adult Basic Education/English for Speakers of Other Languages Committee*. August 2008.

Only one strategy establishes an additional and specific requirement for programs: to develop transition strategies and pathways through collaborations that will help students successfully move ahead to college, job training or job placement.

Two members stated that the strategy was important for purposes beyond providing services to the students: one member said this recommendation was critical to meeting current economic needs, while the other stated that implementing transition strategies and pathways through collaborations is crucial for *“building relationships and support among other stakeholders.”*

There was concern among those who voted “yes” and among those who voted “no” about making this recommendation a new requirement. Of the seven members who voted “no,” two would have supported the recommendation if it were “recommended” or “encouraged,” and not required. One member who voted “no” stated that programs should decide if and how to implement transition strategies depending on the goals of the students; one member who voted “yes” stated that the program should determine the best way to implement transition strategies and pathways for its students. Another member who voted “yes” wanted to temper the language by replacing the definitive “through collaborations” with “including through collaborations” to provide more options and flexibility for programs. Again, this strategy would take on a different character under the service plan model. Rather than require programs to develop transition strategies and pathways through collaborations, the program would decide how best to create successful transitions for their students, possibly through collaborations, but possibly through other means. As one Task Force member repeatedly commented in support of recommendations:

*“Yes, but allow the program to determine the best way to do this.”*

## **SECTION 7: NEXT STEPS**

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ACLS will be seeking comment from the ABE community and other stakeholders through existing venues such as, for example, the Massachusetts ABE Directors' Council, the annual ABE Directors' meeting sponsored by ACLS, and Network, the annual conference sponsored by the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education.

The Task Force encourages active participation during this comment period so that the recommendations accepted by ACLS for implementation continue to truly incorporate the voice of the ABE community. For those recommendations not accepted for implementation, ACLS has committed to providing the ABE community with the rationale for their decision.

## APPENDIX A

### REFERENCE DOCUMENTS PROVIDED TO THE TASK FORCE

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1. ***The Importance of the Adult Basic Education System to Workforce Development***, December, 2006.  
Prepared by the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education at the request of the Patrick/Murray Transition Team Workforce Development Work Group, this white paper provides a concise and comprehensive overview of Massachusetts' ABE system:  
<http://www.mcae.net/WhitePaperABEWrkfrcDev.pdf>
2. ***FY 2008 Adult Basic Education Fact Sheet: What's at Stake***.  
In 2008, MCAE updated the white paper described above with current statistics, including data from the 2005 National Center for Educational Statistics' State Assessment of Adult Literacy (SAAL) and updated wait list data:  
<http://www.mcae.net/FY2008ABEFACTSHEETO40309.pdf>
3. ***Massachusetts' Strategic Framework for Adult Basic Education***, September, 2008.  
Representing the input of over 5,000 stakeholders, this document is designed to create a unified vision for the future of the ABE system that enables all stakeholders to speak with one voice, to assist state policymakers in strategically directing ABE resources where they will have the greatest impact and create new policy options for delivering more effective ABE services throughout the Commonwealth. It points a direction for a future implementation plan that will be informed by the Task Force's work:  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/sp/framework.pdf>
4. ***Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board Report of the Adult Basic Education / English for Speakers of Other Languages Committee***, August 2008.  
In 2007, the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board commissioned the Adult Basic Education /English for Speakers of Other Languages Committee to address two major priorities of the Patrick Administration: raise the overall capacity of the Massachusetts workforce system to respond to the labor market needs of our economy, and close the skills gap that exists between available workers and employers through a strategic use of resources and full engagement of the business sector. This final report makes six recommendations for how the Commonwealth could more effectively use its resources to provide services to help low-literate and low-English proficient adults achieve greater labor market and economic success. The ABE/ESOL Committee considers the findings and recommendations in this report to be an important complement to the report of the Readiness Task Force, also included, below:  
[http://www.mass.gov/Elwd/docs/mwib/mwib\\_abe\\_2008\\_report.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/Elwd/docs/mwib/mwib_abe_2008_report.pdf)

5. ***Ready for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Success: The New Promise of Public Education.*** (*The final report of the Commonwealth Readiness Project*), June, 2008.  
The Governor's Readiness Project is a statewide initiative involving over 200 educators, business leaders, and community leaders who will lead the development of a 10-year strategic plan for the future of education in the Commonwealth, including consideration of some fundamental and systemic challenges that face public education in Massachusetts. The goal of this project is to create a comprehensive, student-centered public education system that begins before kindergarten, continues through grade 12 and higher education, and extends through work force development and lifelong learning to ensure that each individual has the opportunity to achieve her/his full potential. This report outlines the Patrick Administration's Education Action Agenda:  
<http://www.mass.gov/Agov3/docs/Readiness%20Final%20Report.pdf>
6. ***Massachusetts' Guidelines for Effective Adult Basic Education***, updated for FY 2009.  
Based on research and performance data, and developed by ACLS in partnership with the field through task forces, public hearings and other venues, these Guidelines outline the essential program components and processes that constitute effective ABE services. The Guidelines are divided into five sections: the **ABE Rate System** (how the Department funds ABE programs), **Student Services** (requirements for classes, outreach and recruitment, intake, orientation, placement, curriculum, instruction and assessment, instructional materials, educational counseling, ADA compliance, retention, performance standards including standards for setting and meeting student articulated goals, and follow-up requirements), **Program and Staff Development** requirements, **Administration**, and **Program Service Options**:  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/abeguide.pdf>
7. ***Massachusetts Performance Standards for Community Adult Learning Centers***, updated for FY 2009.  
ABE programs report their effectiveness in six areas: attendance, average attended hours, percentage of students who are pre- and post-tested, learner gains, student-identified goals set and met, and the completion of federal National Reporting System Educational Functioning Levels. Each of the six standards contains benchmarks, which allow the state to measure program achievements and assign performance points, and which inform programs' continuous improvement plans. The *Strategic Framework for ABE* commits us to use the performance standards to identify where the system is doing well and where it needs improvement:  
[http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/pawg/fy08fc340\\_345\\_359.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/pawg/fy08fc340_345_359.html)
8. ***Massachusetts Subject Matter Knowledge Requirements and Professional Standards for Adult Basic Education Teachers.***  
Massachusetts offers a voluntary license for teachers of adult basic education. By statute, the Department does not require this license; however, employers have the option of using this license as part of their hiring criteria. Even though it is voluntary, however, the licensing regulations define a foundation of subject matter knowledge requirements and professional standards for teachers of adult basic education – what an ABE teacher needs to know and be able to do to help all learners achieve their goals. The *Strategic Framework for ABE* challenges us to utilize these standards to improve the

quality of teaching throughout the Commonwealth in the following ways: aligning the subject matter knowledge requirements with the content standards in the ABE Curriculum Frameworks; aligning professional development with the ABE professional standards and subject matter knowledge requirements; and encouraging the use of the ABE professional standards and subject matter knowledge requirements to strengthen teaching and learning.

Subject Matter Knowledge Requirements:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr47.html?section=07&flag=abe>

Professional Standards:

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr47.html?section=08&flag=abe>

9. ***Massachusetts Coalition for 85***

10. ***Adult Education Standards for Quality Working Conditions in ABE/ESOL Programs***, January, 2007.

The Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) is a statewide membership organization of educators, adult students, and others who support equal educational opportunities for adults. Developed by a joint MCAE / MATSOL (Massachusetts Association of Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages) Working Conditions Committee, these Standards for Quality Working Conditions in ABE/ESOL Programs represent a field-generated vision of quality that define the characteristics of programs with healthy, respectful working environments and fairly compensated, benefited jobs. The *Strategic Framework for ABE* reiterates the state's commitment to ensuring that funding supports high quality services. The Working Conditions Committee views these standards as a guide for policymakers, funders and programs that seek to support and retain a skilled and experienced workforce:

<http://www.mcae.net/QualityWCStandardsandIndicators0207fin.pdf>

## **APPENDIX B**

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## **APPENDIX C**

### **CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Task Force generated the following criteria, and agreed to use them in evaluating individual proposals and ideas put forth, and in determining which individual proposals would be endorsed as Task Force recommendations:

- 1) Is it aligned with the goals and objectives of the strategic framework?
- 2) Does it promote quality?
- 3) Does it promote responsiveness to local need?
- 4) Does it promote simplification vs. more complexity?
- 5) Is it in keeping with federal requirements?
- 6) Does it promote collaboration across sectors?
- 7) Is it equitable for all (types of) programs?
- 8) Is it likely to help us be more successful in achieving the ACLS mission\*?  
(\*To provide each and every adult with opportunities to develop literacy skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, and better employment, and to reach his/her full potential as a family member, productive worker, and citizen.)
- 9) Is it sustainable?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **SERVICE PLAN PRESENTATION**

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(See attachment)